

The Chief Task of Our Day

By N. LENIN.

Poor thou art, rich thou art,
Strong thou art and weak thou art,
Oh Mother Russia!

The history of mankind is at present passing through one of its greatest and most difficult crises, a crisis with a tremendous—without exaggeration it may be said—with a world-wide liberating significance. From war to peace, from war between beasts of prey, who have sent to the slaughter millions of those toiling and exploited, with the object of securing a re-division among the strongest of the robbers, of the spoils already acquired—to a war of the oppressed against the oppressors for freedom from capitalist oppression; from the abyss of suffering, pain and hunger to the shining communistic society of the future, to general wellbeing and permanent peace;—it is no wonder, at the most acute points of such a tremendous transformation, when round about the old is going to pieces with frightful noise and crash, while in indescribable pains the new thing is being born, that some men's heads should be turned, that others should be seized by despair, and that others should seek relief from actuality, which is at times too bitter, in the shade of fair, enchanting phrases.

Yet it was necessary to feel vividly what was occurring, to live through, in the most excruciating and painful manner, this sharpest of all the sharp turns of history, lifting us out of imperialism into the communistic revolution. In a few days we destroyed one of the oldest, most powerful, most savage and barbarous monarchies. In a few months we passed through a series of agreements with the bourgeoisie, of living down of *petit bourgeois* illusions, for which other countries have required decades. In a few weeks, after having overthrown the bourgeoisie, we defeated its open opposition in a civil war. In a victorious, triumphal progress of bolshevism we have passed from one end of our great country to the other. We have raised to liberty and to independent life the lowest sections of the toiling masses that have been oppressed by Czarism and by the bourgeoisie. We have introduced and strengthened the Soviet Republic, a new type of government, immeasurably higher and more democratic than the best of the bourgeois-parliamentary republics. We organized a dictatorship of the proletariat, supported by the poorest peasants, and inaugurated a widely-planned system of socialistic reconstruction. In millions and millions of workers in all countries we have awakened the faith in their powers and kindled the fires of their enthusiasm. We have sent out in all directions the call of the international workers' revolution. We have thrown down the gauntlet to the imperialistic robbers of all countries.

In a few days an imperialist robber, falling upon us unarmed, has cast us to the ground. He has forced us to sign an incredibly oppressive and humiliating peace—our punishment for having dared, if only for one short moment, to free ourselves from the iron bonds of the imperialistic war. The robber strangles and chokes and dismembers Russia with all the greater fury, the more threateningly he perceives rising before him in his own country the spectre of the impending workers' revolution.

We were forced to sign "Peace of Tilsit." There is no reason for deceiving ourselves as to that. We must have the courage to look right into the face of this bitter, unembellished truth. We must sound to the depths, completely, the whole abyss of defeat and humiliation into which we have now been cast. The better we understand this, the harder and firmer will become our will to free ourselves, to rise again from slavery to independence, our unbending resolve, at whatever costs, to raise Russia from her present poverty and weakness, to make her rich and powerful in the true sense of the word.

And this she may become, for we still have left enough territory and natural resources, to provide each and every one of us, if not with a superabundance, yet with a sufficient supply of the means of subsistence. We have enough, in natural riches and in labour-power, as well as in the stimulus, which our great revolution has communicated to our national productive forces—to create a really rich and powerful Russia.

Russia may become such if we cast aside all discouragement and all oratory, if we strain every nerve and tighten every muscle, if we understand that salvation is possibly only by the path of international socialist revolution, on which we have entered. To advance on this road, undaunted by defeat, to build up, stone by stone, the firm foundation of the socialist society, to work with untiring hand at the creation of discipline and self-discipline, at strengthening, at all times and in all places, the organization, the orderliness, the efficiency, the harmonious co-operation of the forces of the entire nation, a central supervision and control of the production and distribution of products—such is the path to power, whether it be power in the military sense or power in the socialist sense.

It is unbecoming for a socialist, when he has suffered a defeat, to protest his victory loudly or to droop into despair. It is not true that we have no other alternative than that between an "inglorious" (from the point of view of the *shlakhtzy*) death, which is what this terrible peace amounts to, and a "heroic" death in a hopeless war. It is not true that we have betrayed our ideals and our friends by signing the "Peace of Tilsit." We have betrayed nothing and no one, we have neither sanctioned or concealed a single falsehood; to no single friend and companion in misfortune have we refused all the aid in our power. A commander-in-chief, who withdraws the remains of his army, defeated, and afflicted with a panic flight, into the interior of the country, who defends this withdrawal, in a case of extremity, with an intolerable and humiliating peace, is not perpetrating treason with regard to those sections of the army which he can no longer assist and which have been cut off by the enemy. Such a commander is doing his duty when he chooses the only way that is open for saving what can still be saved, consenting to no gambles, embellishing no sad truths in the eyes of the people, "giving up territory, in order to gain time," utilizing every breathing-spell, no matter how short, in order to collect his forces, in order to provide repose and healing for his army, which has become sick with disintegration and demoralization.

We have signed a "Peace of Tilsit." When Napoleon I. forced Prussia in 1807 to make such a peace, he destroyed all the German armies, occupied the capital and all the large cities, introduced his police system, obliged the vanquished to provide an auxiliary army for the conduct of new wars of conquest conducted by the victor, dismembered Germany, and concluded with certain German states alliances against other German states. Yet, in spite of this severe peace, the German people succeeded in maintaining themselves, in gathering their forces, and in attaining for themselves the rights of freedom and independence. To all those who are able and willing to think the example of the Peace of Tilsit—which was only one of the many oppressive and humiliating treaties forced upon the Germans at that time—shows clearly how childishly naive is the thought that under all circumstances a most cruel peace is the depth of degradation, while war is the path of heroism and salvation. Warlike eras have frequently shown that peace may often discharge the function of a breathing-spell for the gathering of forces for near battles. The Peace of Tilsit was the greatest humiliation of Germany and, at the same time, the point of departure for a great national awakening. Historical circumstances at that

time provided no other way out than through a bourgeois state; for, a century or more ago, history was created by a small band of noblemen and the cliques of bourgeois intellects, while the great masses of workers and peasants lay slumbering and unobserving. History at that time, therefore, moved with frightful slowness.

Capitalism has now considerably raised culture in general, and particularly that of the masses. The war has shaken up the masses, has awakened them with unparalleled terrors and sufferings. The war has accelerated the march of history so that it now flies with the speed of a locomotive. History is now made by the independent action of millions and tens of millions of people. Capitalism has reached the stage of socialism.

And therefore, if Russia now can pass, as she indisputably is passing, from a Peace of Tilsit to a period of national uplift, to a great war of national defence, the result of the transition will not be the burgeoise state, but the international socialist revolution. We have therefore become, since Oct. 17, 1917, "defenders"; we are for the "defence of the fatherland," but the fatherland we are defending is the socialist fatherland, we are defending our socialism, which is a section of the universal army of socialism.

"Hatred of the Germans; down with the Germans,"—such was the cry and remains the cry of the ordinary (i. e. bourgeois) patriotism. And we say: "Hatred to the imperialistic robbers, hatred to capitalism, death to capitalism," and, together with this: "We must learn from the Germans! Remain faithful to the fraternal union with the German workers. They have been late in coming to our assistance. We shall wait for their coming, we shall gain time; they will come to our assistance."

Yes, learn from the Germans! History moves in zigzags and in roundabout paths. It so happens that the German at present simultaneously personifies, together with savage imperialism, the beginnings of discipline, organization, harmonious co-operation, on the basis of the modern machine industry, and strict accountability and supervision.

And that is precisely what we lack. That is just what we must learn. That is exactly what our revolution must have in order to proceed from a victorious beginning, through a series of difficult trials, to a victorious conclusion. That is exactly what the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic needs in order to cease being poor and weak, and to become, once for all, rich and mighty.

ORGANIZE THE WORLD SAYS GENERAL SMUTS.

London, England.—General Smuts, presiding recently at a dinner given in honor of the American editors in London, said that during the period of economic reconstruction after the war, when essential raw materials would have to be rationed, a League of Nations became not an ideal or an aspiration, but a sheer practical necessity. Judging from experience in the Balkans, he thought it might be expected that in the future Europe would be in a more disturbed state, with more danger of war, than had been in the past. In the circumstances he thought it would be imperative to create an international organization to keep the peace among the smaller states, even if it were necessary to supervise their internal policing. Referring to the German colonies, General Smuts said that some of these were quite fairly and properly claimed, and would have to be given to the British Dominions that had conquered them and whose future development and security depended upon them. But in the case of colonies not so claimed, he thought a League of Nations could depute certain powers to hold these colonies provisionally until the question of their ultimate disposal was settled.